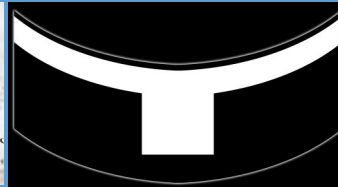


Sacraments of Matrimony and Holy Orders



The Sacrament of Matrimony

Way back in our lesson on the Covenant at Creation, we saw that God created a “covenant within a covenant,” the covenant of marriage. In the Sacrament of Matrimony, a man and a woman are united in such a way that they become one flesh, each belonging to one another. Matrimony is a celebration of a lifelong commitment of faithful love, and an image of God’s love for us. Whenever the authors of the Old Testament wanted to show the beauty of the relationship between the Israelites and their God, they would often compare it with marriage. Jesus took the great natural good of marriage and elevated it to a sacrament. That means that He took what existed before – marriages of course existed before the Church was founded by Jesus – but He has taken this natural good, this reality, and He has made it a way in which His own divine life can be experienced and lived. That’s what the sacraments are all about – experiences of the very divine life of God. In Matthew 19:4-6 we see where Jesus renews the teachings on marriage and elevates them to the level of a Sacrament: *“He said in reply, ‘Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, **what God has joined together, no human being must separate.**”* (emphasis added)

A designated minister of the church is required to be present as a witness to the marriage and to lead the ceremony, but the actual Sacrament itself is administered by the bride and groom to each other. Catholic marriages are regularly done in the context of the Mass, although the Church has other options as well that can be used if there is reason. This is because the Sacrament of Marriage actually involves three, not two—the bride, the groom, and the Lord. One of the main goals of marriage is to lead each other toward heaven.

“Those who are called to the married state will, with the grace of God, find within their state everything they need to be holy.” -St. Josemaria Escriva

Requirements for a Valid Marriage

- ~The couple must be capable of being married—that is, they must be a woman and a man who are free of any impediment that would prevent marriage.
- ~The couple must give their consent to be married — that is, by an act of their will they irrevocably give and accept one another in order to establish marriage (Code of Canon 1057).
- ~The couple must intend to be married for life, and must be open to life.
- ~They must follow the canonical form for marriage—that is, they must be married according to the laws of the Church so that the Church will be certain about the validity of their marriage.

What are Annulments?

"Annulment" is an unfortunate word that is sometimes used to refer to a Catholic "declaration of nullity." Actually, nothing is made null through the process. Rather, a Church tribunal declares that a marriage thought to be valid according to Church law actually fell short of at least one of the essential elements required for a binding union.

Why/When does the Church require this process? In fidelity to Jesus' teaching, the Church believes that marriage is a lifelong bond (see Matt 19:1-10); therefore, unless one's spouse has died, the Church requires the divorced Catholic to obtain a declaration of nullity **before marrying someone else**. (If you are divorced but not looking to remarry currently, you are not required to go through this process, although you certainly are able to if you wish!) The tribunal process seeks to determine if something essential was missing at the moment of consent, that is, the time of the wedding. If so, the Church can declare that a valid marriage was never actually brought about on the wedding day, and the person is free to marry in the Church. This does **not** affect the legitimacy of children that were born of the marriage, it simply declares that the marriage was not sacramental in the eyes of the Church.

The Catholic Church holds that marriage is very good. It is the cornerstone of the family, and the family is the cornerstone of society. Marriage is a gift from the hand of God, who created male and female in his image so that they may become one body. It is a union in faith and a response to God's call to holiness. The couple becomes a symbol of God's love on earth.

The Sacrament of Holy Orders



Some men are called to serve Jesus and the Church today through the Sacrament of Holy Orders. Through their leadership in the Church, they help continue Jesus' presence on earth in the Tradition of the Apostles.

Those who are called to be priests are ordained through the Rite of Ordination. In celebrating this Rite, men receive a permanent spiritual mark, called a character, signifying that they represent Jesus' presence in the Church.

There are three levels of participation in the Sacrament of Holy Orders: as Bishop, as Priest, and as Deacon.

A Bishop receives the fullness of the Sacrament of Holy Orders. He is the head or "Ordinary" of

the local church. The local area entrusted to him is called a Diocese. A Bishop is also a member of the Episcopal College: this is all the bishops who, in union with the pope, guide the Church. Bishops are selected by the Church from her priests. Only bishops can ordain men to Holy Orders.

Priests preside at Liturgies, preach, offer Mass, administer the Sacraments, counsel people, serve as Pastors of parishes, and teach. There are two types of priests: diocesan priests and religious priests. Diocesan priests serve in their dioceses under a Bishop, usually at a parish in the Diocese, and religious order priests serve in and carry out the mission of a particular religious community.

Deacons help and serve Bishops by serving the needs of the Church, often at a parish under the direction of the priest, proclaiming the Gospel, teaching and preaching, baptizing, witnessing marriages, and assisting the priest celebrant at liturgies. Deacons cannot perform all of the Sacraments—they cannot offer Mass, hear Confessions, administer Confirmation or ordination, or give the Anointing of the Sick.

A priest is actually ordained a Deacon on his way to becoming a priest. This step is called a transitional Deacon. Then there are deacons that are called to remain deacons for life and to serve the Church in this capacity. They are known as Permanent Deacons.

Why Celibacy?

The whole first part of our lesson covered marriage, and the goodness of it. You may wonder then, why the Church has a celibate priesthood. Let's look at a couple of reasons for and a couple of misconceptions about the requirements of the Priesthood of Jesus Christ.

First, let's cover who in the Catholic clergy practices celibacy. In order to become a priest in the Catholic Church, a man must freely commit to a celibate life. The Church doesn't force anyone to make this commitment, but it is a pre-requisite for becoming a Catholic priest. Since Catholic bishops are selected from the ranks of her priests, bishops also live a celibate life. Deacons, however, can be married, as long as they are married when they ordained. If their wife passes away, they may not remarry.

Church teaching sees celibacy as a gift that God bestows on those who are called to the priesthood, and it is He that gives them the grace to live it well. The Church looks to the example of Jesus, who was celibate, which must be reflected in the life of a priest. Through celibacy the priest mirrors the love that Christ has for all, a love that the priest, without spouse and children, can also extend to his people. A priest is spiritually married to the Church, and being celibate gives him the freedom to be where his flock, and the Church, needs him to be.

Why the all male Priesthood?



Simply put, Jesus was a man. And He ordained twelve men. Often this fact is discounted because critics will say Jesus ordained only men because of the culture He lived in, which did not value women. This argument should fall on deaf ears however, because Jesus was not known for following the cultural norms of His time. Jesus loved all people, He ate with sinners and with women, and had many women followers. Plus, He's God, with all the

foresight and wisdom that entails. He was not restricted by the culture that existed in that time. It also follows that if Jesus would have wanted women to be priest, He certainly would have ordained His own mother, who had proven beyond all doubt to be a faithful follower of the Lord.

Does this mean that women aren't important in the Church? Not at all. Women hold many valued and important roles in the Church, including leadership roles, teaching roles, and administrative roles.

The Church believes that men and women were created equally, but differently. The two genders are meant to complement one another and each have different strengths, just as individual persons all have different strengths. Women may not be able to be priests in the Church, just as God did not design men to be able to bear children. The Church doesn't see herself as able to change either of these. One is by God's design and one is by God's command. If you remember our lesson on the Overview of the Sacraments, one of the characteristics of a Sacrament is that it was instituted by Christ. When Christ instituted Holy Orders, He ordained men, and the Church is bound to follow the choice of Christ and to continue the Sacrament the way Christ Himself gave it to us.

Ordination in Scripture

There are several passages that refer explicitly to Holy Orders, but here are two of the most well known:

"While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them. "Then, completing their fasting and prayer, they laid hands on them and sent them off." –Acts 13:2-3

"Do not neglect the gift you have, which was conferred on you through the prophetic word with the imposition of hands of the presbyterate." -1 Timothy 4:14 (Saint Paul's letter to Timothy)

In both of these passages we see reference to ordination. In the first we see that it is the Holy Spirit who calls those men who are to be ordained, and the bishops lay hands on them. In the second, Saint Paul is reminding Timothy of the supernatural gifts conferred to him by way of his ordination.

Matter and Form of the Sacrament

The form is the prayer of consecration by the Bishop asking for and conferring the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The matter is the laying on of hands by the Bishop and the anointing of the hands of the one being ordained.

A Note On Religious Orders

A religious order within the Catholic Church is a community of persons, either a men's community or women's community, who profess vows of consecrated life, including celibacy, and live under a superior within a community structure in accordance with the specific rule of life of their order. That is a long way of saying that they dedicate their lives completely to God, and live in a community of persons who have done the same. Their vows are not a Sacrament like Holy Orders, but personal vows to God and their community. Male religious are called different things depending on their order, such a Benedictine monk or a Franciscan Friar. Some male religious also are ordained priests, but some are not. You can be called to religious life without being called to the priesthood.

Women's religious are either called "nuns" or "sisters." Many people think the terms are interchangeable, but they actually are not. A woman who is a nun will be cloistered, away from the world and living a life of prayer in the convent. A woman who is a sister lives in a convent, but is not cloistered. Sisters work with the secular world to teach, do works of mercy, assist in parishes, etc. Regardless of their titles or orders, they live a way of life that is as beautiful as it is counter-cultural, and harkens back to Acts 2:44-47:

"All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one's need. Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area and to breaking bread in their homes. They ate their meals with exultation and sincerity of heart, praising God and enjoying favor with all the people. And every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved."



